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A CHRONOLOGY OF EAST TIMORESE WOMEN'S LIVES

A reflection in silence, a sigh, tears of suffering for the souls of our heroines who lost their lives during the struggle for our self-determination and independence and in the light of the truth, here we report about the everyday life experiences of [East] Timorese women.

THE CONDITION OF [EAST] TIMORESE WOMEN BEFORE THE WAR

The feudal and patriarchal system that lasted for five hundred years in East-Timor created numerous, complex forms of violations of Women's rights. Women had a specially passive and submissive life, not only due to the norms set up by the government, the Church and traditional rituals but also due to the perilous relationship they had with Men. Based on the Women's biological inheritance, as the opposite sex to Men, with their reproductive organs and their maternity functions, society created socio-economic and cultural norms which minimised their active participation in almost all aspects of life: cultural, social and political. They were classified as powerless and they were ideologically and psychologically repressed. Timorese Women gave to Men in special ways, being their companions in procreation and respecting them as the Head of families; Timorese Women were also considered as objects for exchange in the practices of "barlaque", prostitution, polygamy, and also in the so-called 'act of buying slaves' or ATAN, as known by ILHORIS.

During these five hundred years, the above norms of the social system never protected or defended the most elementary human rights of Women.

THE TIMORESE WOMEN IN THE FIRST PHASE OF THE WAR

Since 1975, the conflict in East-Timor has made Timorese Women the victims of major massacres and violence, causing deaths, misery, widowhood and ultimately total genocide of the [Timorese] People. During the confrontation between political parties, which descended into extreme hostilities, the population had to resort to various forms of protection to stay alive; some had to take refuge in Atambua, the neighbouring territory of Indonesia, creating a critical opportunity for the illegal annexation which has lasted until today. Others took refuge in the mountains under the control of FRETILIN. Others stayed in the capital Dili and other regions of the territory.

Of the people who stayed in the capital and other regions, it was the Women, particularly those in the families of political leaders who were the victims of innumerable forms of suffering: imprisonment and physical torture, inhuman treatment of mothers and rape often leading to unwanted pregnancies. Nocturnal intimidation, forced prostitution and others forms of systematic violence took away Women's dignity.

People who took refuge in the mountains under the control of FRETILIN had a more stable situation. They were organised in the "bases de apoio" [support bases] to raise political

awareness and implement fundamental human rights: the right to livelihood, the freedom to participate and take an active role in the building of social institutions; the right to act and to express; the right to cultural activity, education and information; the right to have access to health services and to participate in the concrete and pressing activities associated with the mobilisation of the masses in order to meet the basic needs of the struggle.

Timorese Women, through the Organização Popular da Mulher Timor (OPMT), advocated by the Political Manifesto of FRETILIN, managed to take part efficiently in the struggle for the liberation and independence of the People of East-Timor. Bearing in mind that half of the Maubere population are Women, their participation and contribution to the struggle was indispensable. It helped to build a just, healthy and solid society.

Another section of the population were evacuated to Portugal, Australia and other parts of the Globe. They went as refugees or under the Family Reunification Programme and today they are still living in exile. They have also made an eloquent contribution to the diplomatic front of our struggle.

A revolution was needed in order to transform the time-worn structures inherited from the dying colonial system to lead the Women in the struggle for their emancipation, in defence of their inalienable human rights, independent of their social conditions, ethnic background and religion.

We should remember and pay tribute to our heroines, namely, the Women of Tapó de Bobonaro, who died in battle in defence of our land, on November 3, 1975. This date was later proclaimed by the Democratic Republic of East-Timor (RDTL), as Women's Day. Our heroines include our sisters Muky Bonaparte, Isabel Barreto, Maria Goretti, Silvina, Maria Lobato and many other sisters whom we cannot name individually, whose destiny and heroic actions stand as a example of self-denial to the National Cause. Peace to their souls. May the new generation immortalise them in the annals of
contemporary history.

TIMORESE WOMEN SUFFER ANOTHER BREAK DOWN IN THE SECOND PHASE

After three years of solid resistance in the mountains political awareness-raising and mass mobilisation were exceptionally advanced and successful. These political programmes were carried out without any antagonism, internal conflicts could have exterminated the struggle of the Resistance. All this was achieved despite the misery, the hunger and illnesses originating from the continuous military operations and the permanent occupation of the Territory affecting people in each zone of action (and with each zone of action becoming more limited).

The Indonesian armed forces had to resort to a new strategy of war. The new tactic, the Circle of the Annihilation, was designed to crush the Resistance. Thus people in all different ranks of the leadership of the entire Resistance were captured. Civilians were also caught up in this.

The Women in the Resistance who had become more aware and more emancipated during their three years in the mountains of East-Timor, now had to endure the harshest treatment: most of the them were assassinated or sent to prison; many were raped in front of the Indonesian military by members of their families or men who were captured with them. These Timorese men were threatened with murder [by Indonesian officers] if they refused to rape the women. Despite all these inhuman acts inflicted on them, Timorese Women never gave up their clandestine work and still keep it up to day.

In 1982, the Indonesian government inflicted another form of genocide on the People of East-Timor. They began using a contraceptive product on women without previously explaining the reasons for using it and the consequences that it would have. Later on, however, this was justified, in machiavellian fashion, with the statement that it was a medicine used to recover women's energy/strength in the post-natal period. This experience [the birth control campaign] caused deaths and also led to the spread of other diseases: anaemia, beriberi and also to venereal disease.

Many of those women who were members of or had a function in the clandestine network were forced to report to the military command or to the Intelligence Service on a monthly basis or, in many cases, on a weekly basis. If by any chance, there was an attack [carried out by FALINTIL] and any Indonesian soldiers were killed, these women were detained immediately in the military headquarters where they regularly reported. Unfortunately, others were just kept in these headquarters and were forced to take on the function of "sex suppliers" to the Indonesian forces in town and in the militarised areas. Yet, others were forced to become prostitutes because of their desperate economic conditions, as widows and or as orphans without any form of protection from the government or other institutions.

TIMORESE WOMEN DRIVEN TO DESPAIR

[During the years of the occupation there have been massacres with devastating consequences for the women involved. For example,] in 1983 all the men and young physically able people in the village of Krarás-Viqueque were massacred. This was a traumatic experience for the Timorese Women in this village. Now, a new tragedy has unfolded in East-Timor. In 1998, we have witnessed another form of genocide. Children from a few months to five years old were victims of an ongoing cholera epidemic. Many children went for medical treatment and were hospitalised. Hospitals and emergency services were filled up with sick children. The medical staff carried out their jobs. However, to meet with the requirement of the physical genocide programme, they gave excessive dose of medicines. As a result, 8 to 10 children died everyday throughout the Territory. This form of physical genocide was introduced because Timorese Women rejected the Family Planning Programme. This form of genocide only ceased after an international outcry based on the information sent out of East-Timor by parents.

Nightly arrests and assaults on youth have continued and intensified. Husbands and sons are subjected to illegal trials in Indonesian Courts and sentenced for 10 to 15 years in prison and even for life. The Women have been forced to take on the double functions of bread winner and carer to sustain their families. When resources are depleted, they are forced to become concubines.

The Indonesian transmigration programmes have also increased. The transmigrants are given all the facilities and conditions necessary for their livelihood. The apologists of the integration borrow money in very way and their offspring get grants to ensure they have a better education. Timorese Women, now know how to feign conformity and to appear to be resigned to this disastrous destiny, conforming to overcome all these deep bitternesses while still being committed to their altruistic ideas.

TIMORESE WOMEN DURING THE COURSE OF THE DECADE OF THE 1990s.

With the Peace Plan put forward by our celebrated leader, Xanana Gusmão, there is now a new phase in the struggle. FALINTIL, re-organised under the command of the Conselho Nacional da Resistência Maubere (CNRM), gave great strength to the diplomatic front and to

Timorese endeavours in diplomacy lobbying, giving rise to new forms of struggle within international fora. Within the Clandestine Front, the people who had a patriotic and nationalistic spirit gave even more and made a positive contribution in this next step of the struggle. The new generation of the Timorese Women have participated more decisively in the campaign for mass mobilisation, political awareness raising etc. showing considerable courage and audacity, though in more secret way. However, some of their clandestine networks have been penetrated. Some have been imprisoned again and some have been taken to Court and put on trial. [These women have included]:

1. Domingas Coelho, from 1983 to 1986;
2. Felismina dos Santos da Conceição from 1990 to 1995;
3. Olga and Celina from 1996 to 1998 and many, many others whose names cannot be remembered.

Today, many [married] women live alone, because their husbands are in prison, others are objects of sexual pleasure for the men holding power in East Timor at present and others are 'war widows', without any institutional support.

However, women's work [in the Resistance] only began to be reorganised from last year, through the movement known as the Organização da Mulher Timor (OMT). This is still a clandestine movement and in this phase of the struggle, the activities they will focus on include:

1. Raising political awareness;
2. Providing logistical support to the Resistance Forces;
3. Campaigning and mobilising, to support the hygiene and health of women in the Resistance
4. Fund-raising to sustain the war effort, and
5. Disseminating information.

As Women are a specific group of war victims, in July 1997, a Forum for Communication among Women was formed by a group of Women activists. This Forum was established because there is no institution which takes care of women victims or acts to improve the conditions of Women. The Forum is concerned with:

1. War widows;
2. Women prisoners and ex-prisoners;
3. Women who have been victims of rape; and
4. Wives of political prisoners.

The activists are volunteers and work with an NGO, which aims to combat discrimination against Women following the UN Convention on Women's Rights (Law No7, 1987). Their activities were facilitated after Indonesia signed and ratified the UN Convention.

In the light of the above information, and with a view to promoting peace and tranquillity, based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Timorese Women make the following demands:

1. We propose that all Developed Nations should suspend all military aid to Indonesia, in order to halt the oppression, particularly of Timorese Women;
2. We propose to the European Union that a cease-fire should be called for between warring parties: the Guerrillas Forces and the Indonesian Armed Forces;
3. We propose a cease-fire overseen by the UN, with the participation of multi-national forces for peace and with the participation of international organisations such as the Commission for Human Rights, Amnesty International and other related organisations;

4. We propose that with the cease-fire, Indonesian troops should withdraw within different phases and eventually there could be a decommissioning of arms by the Guerrillas Forces.
5. We propose that all political prisoners should be released and conditions should be created for them to take part in the political process in East-Timor.
6. We propose that conditions should be established for peaceful dialogue between all parties involved, leading to a peaceful and a just solution between:

n Timorese of different political allegiance;
n The Portuguese and Indonesian Governments
n The Portuguese, Indonesian Governments and the People of East Timor;

7. We express our solidarity and unconditional support for the creation of the Conselho Nacional da Resistência Timorense (CNRT). We welcome it as an absolutely necessary step and the will of the People of East-Timor to move towards a rapid solution for the liberation of our country. Consequently we congratulate and honour all those involved in its creation, and especially its President, our historic leader Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão. We salute him.

And finally, to the Portuguese government, to the governments of Portuguese Speaking Countries and to all countries which are dedicated to peace and liberty, we appeal to you for your support for the cause of the Maubere People.

To all, many thanks,

Dili, East-Timor, August 15, 1998.
On behalf of the Organização da Mulher Timor (OMT)

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